

New Haven Public Schools

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON TEACHER CERTIFICATION BILLS

Senator Gaffey, Rep. Fleischmann, members of the Education Committee, my name is Donna Aiello, Coordinator of Staff Development for New Haven Public Schools, here today on the teacher certification bills.

We applaud the Education Committee and the State Department of Education for addressing teacher certification issues. Teacher quality is critical to a successful educational experience and in closing the achievement gap, and we support efforts to help us attract and retain qualified teachers. A key focus of our District Improvement Plan is improving teacher quality.

To that end, there are many components in Senate Bill No. 939, AAC Educator Certification, House Bill No. 6654, AA Establishing a Resident Teacher Certificate, and House Bill No. 6666, AAC Teacher Certification, that we support. Those elements are outlined below and in attached testimony from our Science and Mathematics Supervisors and from the Principal of the Cooperative Arts & Humanities Interdistrict Magnet High School.

Before we detail our support and additional suggestions, I would like to note that we share the concern expressed by some Education Committee members at the March 9th public hearing about the gap between the current BEST program and the uncertainty of its replacement. Large districts, such as New Haven, will be faced with the severe hardship of providing resources, both monetary and personnel, to mentor teachers in their first three years. The State's handoff to school districts for the responsibility of qualifying teachers for certification creates additional stress and burdens for already struggling school districts. We need to provide mentoring support to develop and retain highly qualified teachers, as it takes several years to develop a skilled classroom teacher.

We support provisions in the bills to allow teachers to fill shortage areas through alternative routes and "testing in," just as we support making it easier for us to hire teachers currently certified in other states.

We appreciate the efforts of Teach for America in bringing teachers to the New Haven Public Schools. We find that some are committed to just their two years and others do want to stay longer, and we want to encourage their retention.

We have particular concerns about the current laws and regulations as they pertain to areas in science, math and in the arts.

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Thus, written testimony from Richard Therrien, our Science Supervisor, details the problems with the current requirements for science subject areas. We believe a science major could teach a range of science courses, and not just the area in science where the teacher has 30 credits. This is an important distinction at a time when we need teachers with strong teaching skills as well as an academic background and not just the latter. We recommend revising Section 4 of HB 6666 so that an applicant for a science endorsement have 18 credits in specific subject areas with a total of 30 credits in science.

Our math and science supervisors both would prefer passage of Praxis II and 12 credits in their overall subject area for DSAP.

For the arts, we share the concerns expressed by the Educational Center for the Arts in New Haven. Our Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School is an interdistrict magnet school. It is in a new building and the enrollment will be growing from 450 students to 650 students, 40% of whom are from the greater New Haven region. Our vision includes hiring practicing artists part-time in addition to our full-time teachers. Therefore, we fully support Section 5 of HB 6666. There is one additional concern not addressed by the bill. Many dancers do not have bachelor's degrees and thus Section 5 of the bill does not help us hire them. We suggest revising Sec. 10-145f(b)(4) of the general statutes – which appears as Section 6 of HB 6666 – to include the arts as trade-related or occupational subjects, under certain circumstances.

We appreciate your support for our efforts in New Haven. We have had major gains in State mastery test scores across the board at all levels, including many double digit increases at many schools. These gains continue the momentum and steady gains across the district. Last February our Cambridge Evaluation Report highlighted many areas of achievement and solid structures within the Board of Education, noting New Haven as a model among Urban School Districts in Connecticut; we continue to work with the State and others on our District Plan of Improvement.

Our school district's improvements are team efforts, for frequent student data assessments, academic interventions, curriculum development and implementation, professional development, tutoring, and classroom improvements. We cannot do it alone and we have much more to do. Strong leaders are needed at every school, and we must support the teachers in every classroom. Our assessments are helping, and so is professional development. We see more interventions as key tools to success, linked with our other efforts. Our families are increasingly stressed as the economic situation worsens, and people look to the schools to teach children and to provide activities, daytime into evening and throughout the year. Schools alone cannot provide all the answers but funding cuts make our job that much harder. We want to continue to improve – dramatically so – and cannot do so without State support.

Thank you. We would be happy to answer any questions.

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Facts about New Haven Public Schools:

- 20,000 students attend New Haven Public Schools; 1,987 of these students are from 30 towns; there are 17 interdistrict magnet schools, 4 intra-district magnets for New Haven students, and 3 lighthouse schools. A total of 7,325 students attend magnet schools in New Haven. We had nearly 7,000 applications for our magnet program; the lottery took place March 5th. In December, two New Haven high schools were among just 16 high schools across Connecticut that were awarded US News & World Report's Silver designation, and one New Haven high school was among the five awarded a Bronze designation; all three are interdistrict magnet schools. And, John C. Daniels School of International Communication has been awarded the status of 2009 Magnet School of Excellence by Magnet Schools of America, which selects 75 magnet schools in the nation for this top category.
- 23 of 31 schools are K-8 or pre-K-8. New Haven was #1 in its district reference group for the CMT in many areas, including math, reading and science. Grade to grade cohorts showed increases at every grade level in reading and math, and many schools had double digit gains.
- Nine schools made Safe Harbor; three of them were in Restructuring.
- We have a literacy and math coach in every school and they work with students and teachers in smaller group settings.
- Positive behavior support program is being piloted in five schools and the Comer School Reform model is being implemented in seven schools.
- Suspensions decreased by 1,228 students last year, the four-year dropout rate is 15.3% and school attendance is up.
- Curriculum is being strengthened as is work on effective use of instructional time.
- High schools posted the best gains in the district CAPT scores since the administration of CAPT began: 9% in reading and 11% in writing.
- Over 500 students took AP courses, with a 73% increase since 2003 for those scoring 3 or higher.
- There has been a 21 point increase in SAT scores since 2003. In 2008, 1,003 students graduated and 82.3% went on to 146 two- or four-year colleges. UCONN accepted 140 students.
- We have numerous partnerships with higher education institutions and others.
- New Haven is the largest school-based pre-school provider in the State and 79% of pre-school teachers have a 2-year college degree.
- The school construction program has resulted in 29 new and renovated schools opened since 1998 with five more in construction and four more in planning and design; they contribute to an improved learning environment, as noted in the Cambridge Report.
- State designation as the #1 Wellness Policy which reflects the Physical Activity and Wellness (PAW) programs (funded through private grants), and a variety of healthy education initiatives that are being employed across the District with our student population.
- Successful transition to in-house Food Service Program with dramatic transition in healthy menu choices for children, increased student participation and federal reimbursements and successful awards of numerous grants related to fresh fruits and vegetable and breakfast programs and recognitions for the efforts to increase healthy eating and awareness and decreasing obesity. Utilization of updated computerized systems to track purchasing and consumption which has served to more efficiently track costs and manage the system more effectively.